

GETTING ACQUAINTED WITH THE PEOPLE OF ARGENTINA

Former Premier of France Writes His Impressions of the Inhabitants and the Relation to the French.

This is the fourth of a series of articles giving his impressions of South America, written by the former Premier of France.

By Georges Clemenceau.

It is now time to return to the city to get a little better acquainted with its inhabitants. As a matter of fact, the features upon which I have touched—the town, port, promenades, palaces, settlements, agricultural products, manufactures or commerce—do more or less reveal the native, and although I have said nothing of his person beyond that he looks very like a Euro-

pean, my reader has certainly gathered some light as to his way of living.

To the Argentine extra muros, the citizen of Buenos Ayres is the "porteño," that is, the man of the port, the townsman kept by the sea, in constant contact with Europe and more readily undertaking a trip to London or Paris than to Tucuman or Mendoza. On his side, while professing great esteem for the provincials, (for in the Argentine patriotism amounts to mania,) the porteño is inclined to pity those who pass their lives far from the capital and the countryman looks good humoredly at his strange compatriot who knows naught of the Campo, whence are brought to his door the corn and cattle which are the outcome of the highest and mightiest efforts of their common National energy, and which by his means are to be exchanged for European produce in an ever widening and developing trade.

This is, however, but a superficial judgment that we may permit ourselves to make, but if we look more closely into the National character, we shall perceive that if the "porteño" is the nearer to Europe and hastens thither on the smallest pretext, if he is more thoroughly imbued in European culture, if he takes more interest in the doings of the Old World, attaching the greatest importance to its opinion of his own country; if it is his dearest ambition that the youthful Argentine Republic shall comport herself nobly among the old peoples of a weary civilization; if it is his constant care to obtain from beyond sea, the advantages gained by experience, to be turned to account by his own Nation, we should be greatly mistaken in assuming that European contact or descent could lead either citizen or farmer "porteño" or "estanciero," to prefer to his own land that Old Continent which his forefathers deserted, in the hope, already realized, of finding on this virgin soil fertilized by their own labor a better chance of success than the Old World could offer him.

While the physiognomy of the streets of Buenos Ayres is wholly European in symmetry, style, and even in the expression of the faces to be seen thereon, yet this people is Argentine to the very marrow of the bones, exclusively and entirely Argentine. New York is nearer to Europe and New York is North American in essence as completely as Buenos Ayres is Argentine. The difference is that in New York and even in Boston or Chicago, North Americanism is patent to all eyes in type, in carriage, and in voice as much as in feeling and manner of thinking, whereas the pliancy of Buenos Ayres lies in the fact that it offers the spectacle of rabid Argentinism under a European veil.

And, strangely enough, this inherent fingoism, which in some nations that shall be nameless assumes so easily an offensive guise, is here displayed with an amiable candor that is most disarming to yourself. Not satisfied with being Argentine from top to toe, these people will, if you let them, Argentinize you in a trice.

To tell the truth, there are some (I have met a few) who speak ill of the country—and these critics are people who had not even the excuse of having been unsuccessful in their business affairs here. There are systematic grumblers everywhere, who endeavor to give themselves importance by finding fault with their surroundings. Those who are not pleased with their stay in a foreign country should remind themselves that nobody prevents them from returning to their own.

I have already mentioned that many Italians cross the sea for the harvesting in Argentina and then, taking advantage of the difference in the seasons, return home to cut their home corn. This backward and forward movement has grown enormously. But in the long run the attraction of a land that overflows with agricultural wealth and offers a life of ease and comfort to the foreigner, is a powerful lure. I have not sought to conceal the fact that the largest number of emigrants make the mistake of stopping at Buenos Ayres, whose population is thus increased, and all proportion with the development of Argentine territory. This mass of working people, who necessarily remain easily accessible to European influences, offers apparently an excellent field for revolutionary propaganda.

Anarchists and Socialists spare no pains to make proselytes here, in order to strengthen their hands. A violence of speech and action has in this way given to certain strikes a truly European aspect. Still, in a country in which there is a constant supply of work, it is hardly possible that disturbances arising rather from doctrine than from existing social evils can take any hold on or materially affect any considerable extent of territory.

If I am to believe what I heard in all parts, the Russian Anarchists have a specially redoubtable organization. To mention only the most recent of events: It is known that the Chief of the Police who had directed in person some ruthless repressive measures was killed in the street by a bomb thrown by a Russian, who was protected from the full severity of the law by his tender age. The death penalty, abolished in Uruguay, does still exist in the Argentine Republic, but execution is rare. The last dates several years back. The condemned man is shot by the troops.

Last June, a few days before I left Europe, a bomb was thrown by some unknown person in the Colon Theatre, falling in the middle of the orchestra and wounding more or less seriously a large number of persons. The Colon Theatre, in which opera is given, is the largest and perhaps the handsomest theatre in the world. The open boxes of the pit tier, like those of the two first tiers and orchestra, present when filled with young women in evening dress the most brilliant spectacle that I have ever seen in any theatre.

In such a setting, imagine the catastrophe that could be caused by a bomb! The injured were carried out somehow or other, the house was emptied amid loud and furious outcries, and, the damage having been repaired in the course of the following day, not a woman in society was absent from her place at the performance of the evening.

This is a very fine trait of character which does the highest honor to the women of Argentine society. I am not sure that in Paris, under similar circumstances, there would have been a full house on the night following such a disaster. It is easy to understand, however, that the fury of the public found expression in an act of Parliament of terrible severity directed immediately against any suspicious groups. The criminal in the present case has not yet been discovered, though during my stay in Buenos Ayres there occurred a sensational arrest which led the authorities to believe they had laid hands on the guilty man.

A state of siege was in some sense declared, and the Government obtained extraordinary powers, to be used only against organizations believed to be anarchical. The extreme penalty of transportation to Terra del Fuego under conditions that no one would, or perhaps could, describe to me. I am without the necessary returns for establishing the results obtained.

Some complaints reached me from the more populous quarters affirming that the innocent had been punished; all I could do was to hand them over to the authorities. I can testify that in my presence, in any of the circles of Buenos Ayres society that I was able to observe, no Anarchist outrages were on any single occasion the subject of conversation. More than once I led up to it. They replied invariably that the question was one for public authority, that the Government was armed and would take action, and, if further powers should prove necessary, they would be granted. Then the topic was changed.

There is no doubt that the Argentine Government, like that of Great Britain, is resolved to finish, once for all, with crimes which arouse only horror in all the civilized world. In the course of a hasty

visit I had occasion to pay to the Police Department, in the company of the City Superintendent, M. Guillaud, (at the very moment of the arrest of the man who was believed to have thrown the bomb in the Colon Theatre,) I could see that not only is the force a very powerful one but that it has at its head men of energy and decision who are determined to repress deeds of violence, of which all or nearly all are committed by persons not of Argentine nationality.

While on the subject, one may note that the Argentine police have adopted and perfected the system of identification of criminals by the marks of the thumb. First, the imprint of all ten fingers is taken, so as to make mistake impossible and arrive at absolute certainty. Then, acting on the principle that it may be as useful to identify an honest man as a bandit, identification certificates are issued to the public, for a small fee, containing an enlargement of the thumb imprint.

A crowd of people waiting at the door of the office that makes and furnishes these documents showed that the public fully appreciated their usefulness. Young men and old were submitting in silence to have their ten fingers smeared with a sort of wax not easily removed by soap and water. Each in turn departed well pleased that the stigma of "Unknown" would never be attached to his grave. It appears that it has become the fashion to resist one's thumb at the police station before starting on any journey. M. Guillaud told us that his own son, now in Europe, had taken this precaution before exposing his person to the risks of the elements and the unceremonious manners of Parisian Apaches.

In the days of the stage coach Parisians used to be laughed at for making their wills and taking out passports before starting on a journey to Etampes. Now, behold! By other routes we have returned to the good old days. And funny as it may appear to those of us who like to believe that civilization in South America is more or less rudimentary, it is precisely this country which thus in scientific fashion guards against the barbarous ways of the capitals and country districts of Europe.

There was recently a story of an Argentine who was drowned on our coast, and whose body was subsequently washed up on shore, with the head frightfully mutilated. As, however, the telltale thumb had been preserved, he was quickly identified. If this story had been told me in time I should certainly have allowed as much of my person as was necessary to be dipped in wax instead of venturing to start on my homeward journey without the simple proofs of identity which would have sufficed to place beyond doubt the status of any Jonah in the depths of a whale. As it is, in spite of my imprudence, I reached home with my head still on my shoulders. Pure luck! Never again will I trust myself at sea without this elementary precaution, which would so radically have changed the fortunes of Ulysses in rocky Ithaca.

After this digression, which is only excused by the importance of the subject, I want to finish what I began to say about the rabid Argentinism of our friends. I had a great surprise one day when speaking respectfully of the fine qualities of the Spaniards. Some highly cultured men present interrupted me, and criticised severely the race from which they had sprung in terms one might have expected from an Anglo-Saxon but not from a Latin. Therefore I must ask my readers not to imagine that the Argentines are merely Spaniards transplanted to American soil. No! The real Argentine, though he would never confess it, seems to me convinced that there is a magic elixir of youth that springs from his soil and makes of him a new man, descendant of none but ancestors of endless generations to come.

That there is indeed a regenerating influence in this youthful land is proved by the power it yields over newcomers of whatever origin. The Argentine in particular is Argentinized before he is Argentinized. In the provinces as in Buenos Ayres I had a hundred thousand examples of this before my eyes. You ask a child, the son of an emigrant, whether he speaks Italian or Spanish. He answers haughtily: "At home we all talk Argentine."

Another, unable to deny that he was born in Genoa, although he claimed Argentine nationality, murmured by way of excuse: "I was so little."

I may add that in the primary schools where these replies were made to me the teaching was the epitome of Argentine patriotic spirit as might be guessed from the pictures and inscriptions on the walls. It appears that on the day of the national fête the pupils of the primary schools have to take an oath of fidelity to the flag, which is called the "juro de la Bandera," and is accompanied by speeches and patriotic songs that cannot help making an impression on the children. But Alsace-Lorraine and Poland are a witness to the fact that unless the heart be wholly won authority may labor in vain.

As I want to be wholly sincere here I must admit that the French take this Argentine contagion with remarkable facility. I should grievously wrong our own excellent colony, however, if I did less than justice to its ardent patriotism. It is only when tried that love grows and grows purer. In absence the fatherland seems the dearer in proportion as it is connected with the recollection of sufferings that left us stripped of all but honor.

The public work of the French colony speaks loudly for it. Its most important achievement is the French Hospital,

founded long ago, but, thanks to its Governor, M. Basset, and its chief physician, Dr. G. Laure, it is invaluable. As I was leaving the building after a visit I shall not soon forget, the Chairman of the Board of Directors showed me a bust of Pasteur standing among the trees, and asked what I thought of a suggestion to place near it a figure of Lorrain. Although the symbolism in the two statues would be entirely different, I warmly concurred in the plan. There is, after all, a delicate connection between these two manifestations of the soul of France—the desire for knowledge and the courage to hold.

These men, who have presented to the City of Buenos Ayres a monument worthy of France in commemoration of the friendship of the sister republics, and who on the occasion of the floods in Paris of last year sent a check for \$30,000 to assuage the worst of the distress, never miss an opportunity of showing their loyalty to the mother country. Yet, how many sons of France one meets at every step who have gone over to the Argentine, head and heart, beyond all possibility of return.

One large manufacturer of the port is a nephew of a member of our National Assembly of 1871. I noticed when inspecting his very remarkable establishment that he speaks French less fluently than Spanish, while his two brothers, who pay frequent visits to Paris, have become thorough Argentines. A curious thought about them is that they have more entirely acquired the South American type than any other men I know.

Now the South American type is every bit as marked as the North. Again, I might take the case of one of our most eminent compatriots who left France in his twentieth year, but who has remained French to the very marrow of his bones. His son is an official of high position in the Argentine. Doubtless his marriage with a woman of the country laid the foundation for this South American family. The atmosphere of the home is nat-

urally altered, and his material interests indissolubly riveted to the soil that feeds him and his family, attune the settler insensibly to new ways, and gradually transform his whole habit of mind to the new pattern.

Can anybody explain why this is not the case with the French who try their fortune in North America, and why in Canada the two races live side by side in all harmony, but never mix? It must be that "blood is thicker than water," as says the English proverb, and that the Latin element blends more readily with a

Latin agglomeration than with an Anglo-Saxon community. Here I have seen over and over again that after two or three generations nothing remains of the original stock but the name.

I know of but one instance where the Latin organism has been completely assimilated by a northern race, and that is the French emigration to Germany in consequence of the revocation of the Edict of Nantes. But in that case a community of religious fervor, strengthened by an odious persecution, was the active agent in the blending of the Latin mind and character with that of Germany. We all remember that the first German Governor of Alsace-Lorraine was the descendant of a French emigrant. Some of us may recall the furious address of the learned Dubois-Reymond to the youth of Prussia in 1870, urging them over the frontier of the land from which their ancestors were driven by the sabres of the dragons of Louis XIV.

To return once more to our French-Argentines. I ought to say that the severe application of French military law but too often embitters them against the mother country. In its haste to increase its population, the Argentine awards nationality to the children of foreign-born, born on Argentine soil, and nationalization carries in its train military service,

It is the same system adopted by ourselves in Algiers toward Spanish colonists. The consequence is that the son of French parents duly registered at the French Consulate in order to preserve for him his father's nationality, finds himself later called simultaneously to serve under two flags, on opposite side of the ocean.

What is he to do? In the Argentine, where military service is very short, are all his future prospects, while in France no place has been kept open for him. If France were in danger and called to him for help, he would not hesitate. But failing that, his actual surroundings make it hard for him to decide. The majority respond to the call to the Argentine flag, and by so doing fall into the class of "insoumis" on French soil, except in cases where the father with a forethought that cannot be approved, has omitted to register the birth at the Consulate.

If I remember rightly, ten only out of forty youths called up, leave Buenos Ayres annually to answer to their names at the French roll call. One wonders whether the result be sufficient to justify steps that might easily trouble our relations with the French colony in this country. For the young "insoumis" can never set foot on French soil without finding the gendarmes after him. Yet his business will call him inevitably to Europe.

Where will he take his orders when France has shut her doors to him? England, Belgium, Switzerland, and Germany, are open to him. I heard recently a story about a Frenchman of Buenos Ayres who ventured to Lille and had only just time at a warning from a friend to escape over the border.

I need not dwell on the matter, but it is easy to see how detrimental the present state of the law is to French families living in the Argentine, Brazil and other American countries as well as to France herself. We manage in this way to drive from the national fold a number of young

men who would in time of danger respond heartily to a call from the mother land. Wherever I went, I heard the same cry. The Consuls, the French Minister could only reply: It is the law. But the Frenchman who follows the flag in some foreign land demands an alteration in a law which ought not to be applied with the same rigor, both to youths living in Basle, Brussels, Geneva, and to those who have found a field for their activities across the sea.

To me it seems only justice to establish a distinction in our legislation between these two categories of French subjects. For example, I heard of the case of an eminent politician, M. Pellegrini, the son of an inhabitant of Nice, and therefore French, who in his youth got into difficulties in the way described with the French recruiting service, and who later, having risen to the position of President of the Argentine Republic, received the grand cordon of the Legion of Honor. The red ribbon or the Council of War—which seems the more appropriate reward to citizens of this kind?

Of course, we must all regret that valuable citizens should thus be taken from France at the moment when she needs every one of her children. At the same time we must consider that a Frenchman who has become Argentine is by no means lost to France, as might be the case in the United States, for instance, where the Latin is rapidly submerged by the irresistible flood of Anglo-Saxonism.

In the Argentine, on the contrary, the Northern races prove merely a useful element of methodical intelligence and tenacity, which is in time ingulfed by the great Latin wave. There are important German colonies in Brazil and elsewhere in the Argentine. English and North Americans all have prosperous manufactures there. Yet in a race that has preserved integrally its Latinity, all this is of but secondary interest, and the tendency remains immovably in the track of peoples of Latin stock, among whom it may with the presumption be said that the French exert the most powerful influence.

In his way, any Frenchman of average intellect and moral value, who becomes incorporated in the Argentine nation, must almost infallibly at the same time for I doubt if any Frenchman is ever really un-French—materially aid in permanently strengthening French prestige.

What are we to think of men like M. Paul Groussac, who holds an eminent place in Buenos Ayres, but who would equally in his own land have reached the very front rank? M. Groussac, having gone through our naval training school, set out to see the world. One day, his pockets empty, he arrived at Buenos Ayres, where courageously he hired himself as gaucha—that is, keeper of the inn—equally Tucuman and he undertook to drive a train of mules to Peru. He accomplished the journey successfully, covering the same route four times in all, each journey taking four months. Later we find him acting as schoolmaster. In Tucuman he had tied on the back of the French outlaw, Jacques, who, having escaped to the Argentine after the coup d'etat of Dec. 2, was devoting himself entirely to public education on lines taken up later and developed by President Sarmentino. We had the pleasure of seeing in the place of honor at the Training College of Tucuman the portraits of the two French founders, Jacques and Paul Groussac.

From time to time the latter brother has published various literary works, notably some short stories in which Argentine life and character are brilliantly set forth, and the name of their author has achieved a wide celebrity. Then M. Hileret, the great French sugar manufacturer of Santa Ana, placed a large capital at the disposal of Paul Groussac with which to start a daily paper destined to reveal in the person of its editor in chief a writer of remarkable force.

Today, you may hear that Paul Groussac is the leading Spanish writer of our times, which by no means prevents him from contributing to our own Journal des Débats some brilliant articles, amply proving his mastery of his own maternal language, not to mention a curious study by him of that literary enigma, the Don Quichotte of Avellaneda.

One day Paul Groussac was struck by the need of a National library for the Argentine Republic. In an interview with President Roca, who cannot be accused of any partiality for him, Groussac obtained a grant of the building intended (alas!) for public lotteries, in which the future library might be installed. He set to work immediately. The National Library of the Argentine under the control of M. Groussac is now without a rival in South America, and can bear comparison with many similar institutions on the old continent.

One of the pet hobbies of M. Groussac is now to open a French Lycée in Buenos Ayres with the support of both Governments. His eldest son, an Argentine, has just been appointed to the post of Under Secretary of State in the Office of Public Instruction by M. Saenz Pena.

For some reason or other all the fine qualities of this illustrious compatriot of

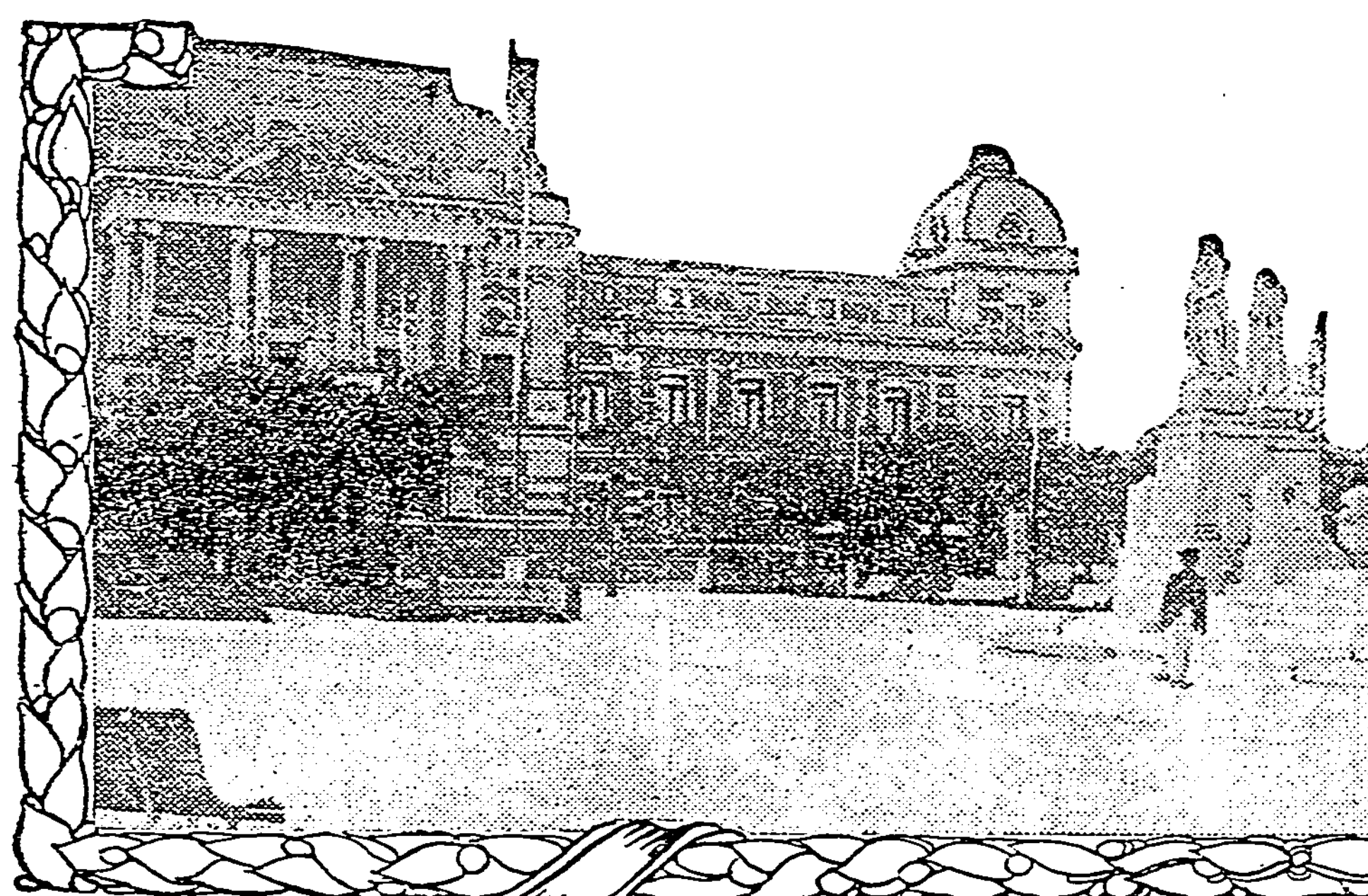
ours have been lost sight of for the reason that through some defect—I had almost said vice—in his character he has won the reputation of being the surliest of bears. Having myself also to some extent a reputation for being less than amiable, I wondered whether the two of us might not come to blows if we met. Considering in some sort my bald head a protection, I ventured into the bear's den and found only the most affable and genial of men whose claws were of velvet and his tusks of sugar. Thus we made friends at once, and I found that the much-dreaded beast had nothing terrible about him unless it was a strong accent of the Gers.

Since that day I have done my best to dispel so injurious a prejudice against the man. I can only explain the tenacity that I found everywhere by the words of Tacitus, who remarked of his father-in-law, Agricola: "He chose rather to offend than to hate." It is a rare enough trait among men, this, which, like Alcibiades, in order to avoid the baseness of falsehood, prefers not to conceal a real opinion. It is a very easy thing to do in this way such men manage to offend the vulgar talker greedy for flattery in spite of their kindly feeling toward their fellows.

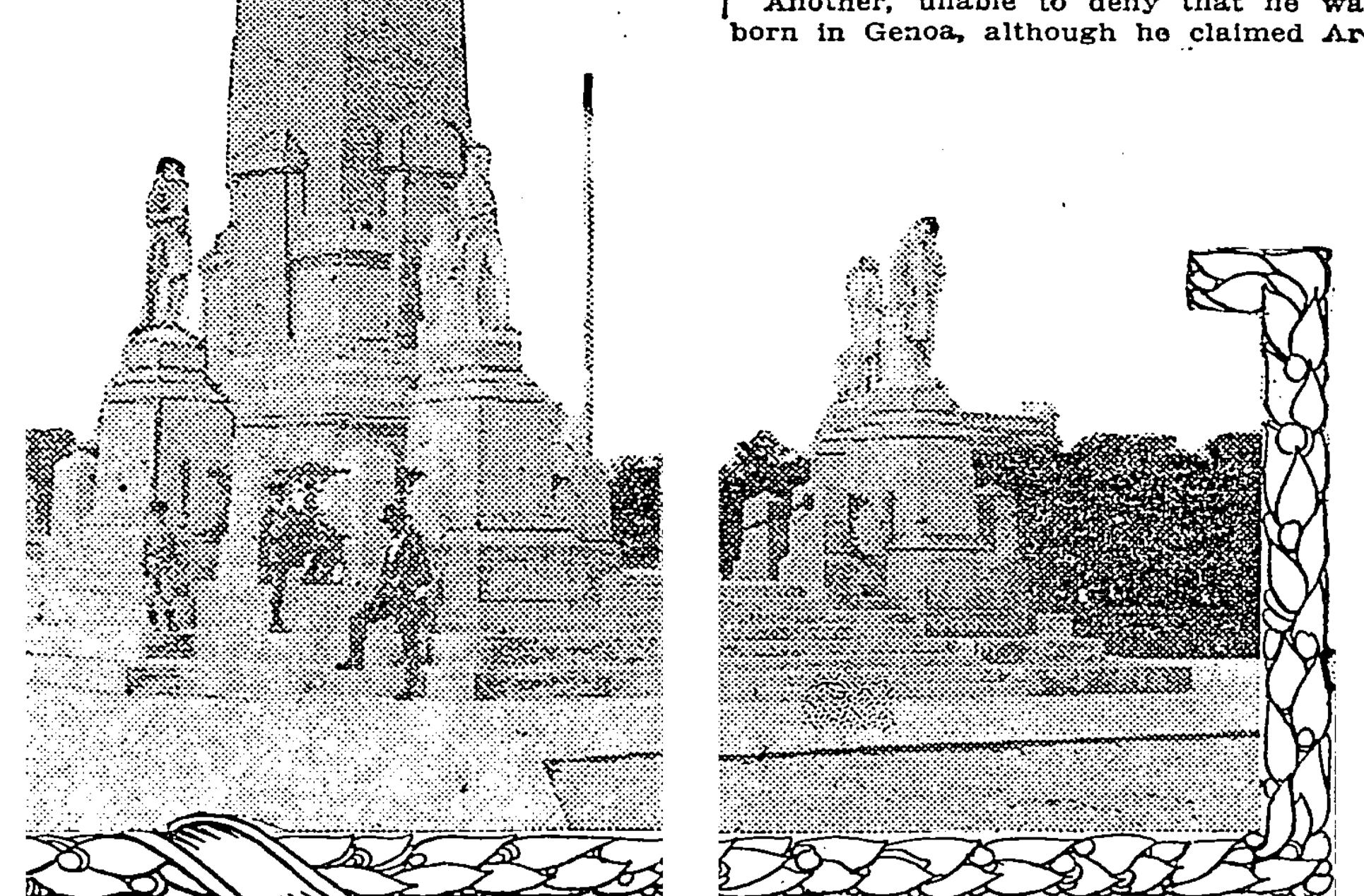
If we consider for a moment the sentiment aroused in us by the general practice of using words to conceal our thoughts, we must recognize that we are the first to suffer by this universal vice, not to say cowardice—in that we only expect from others what we ourselves give; namely, hypocritical phrases, leading to crooked actions, and causing that silent but lasting dislike which forms the principal obsession in the life of many among us. If it is a less offence to inspire than to harbor dislike, let us absolve the men who fail to win universal regard, but who are nevertheless wholly incapable of harming a creature.

Unless I am misinformed, we shall soon have the pleasure of seeing Paul Groussac in Paris. A chair of history of the Argentine

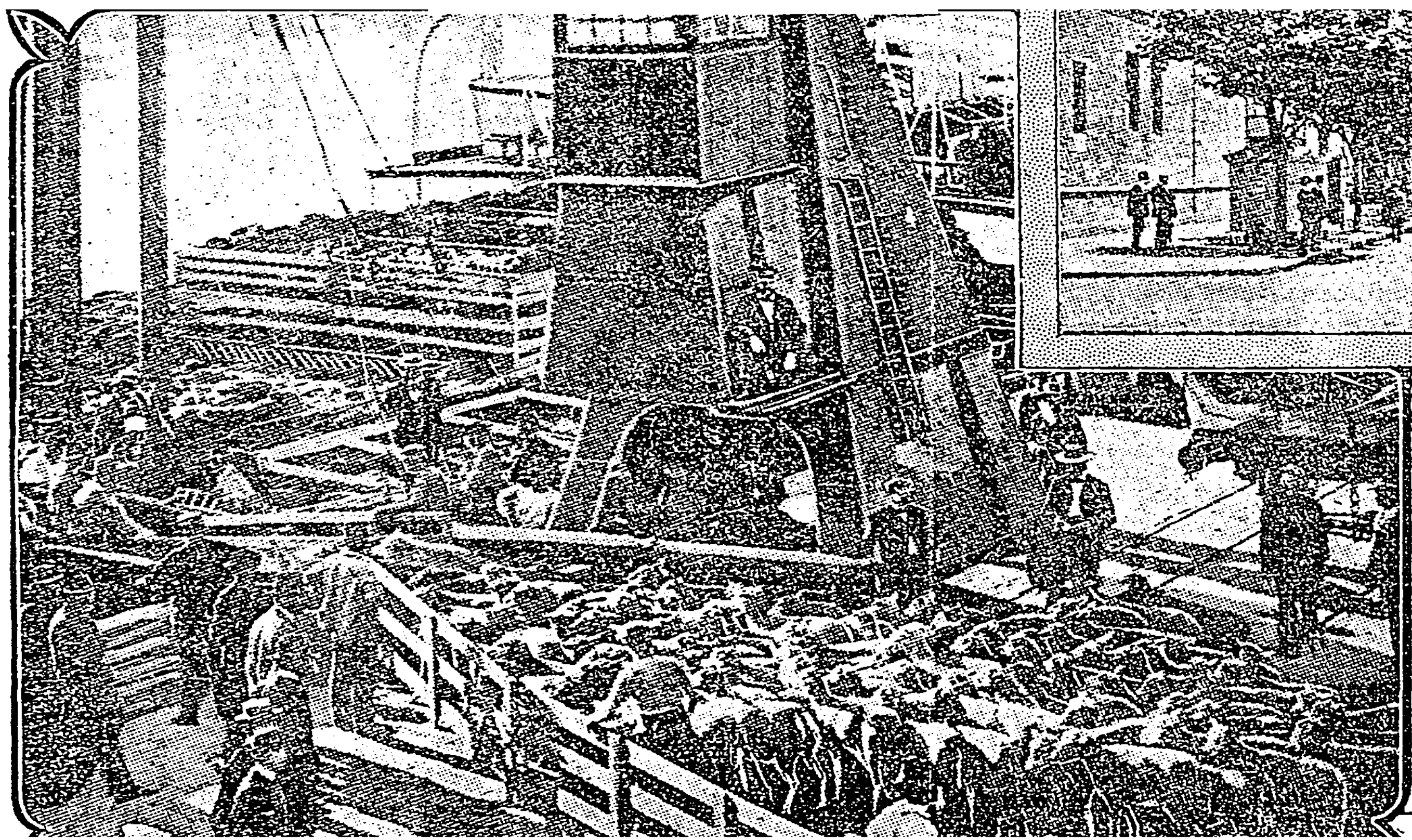
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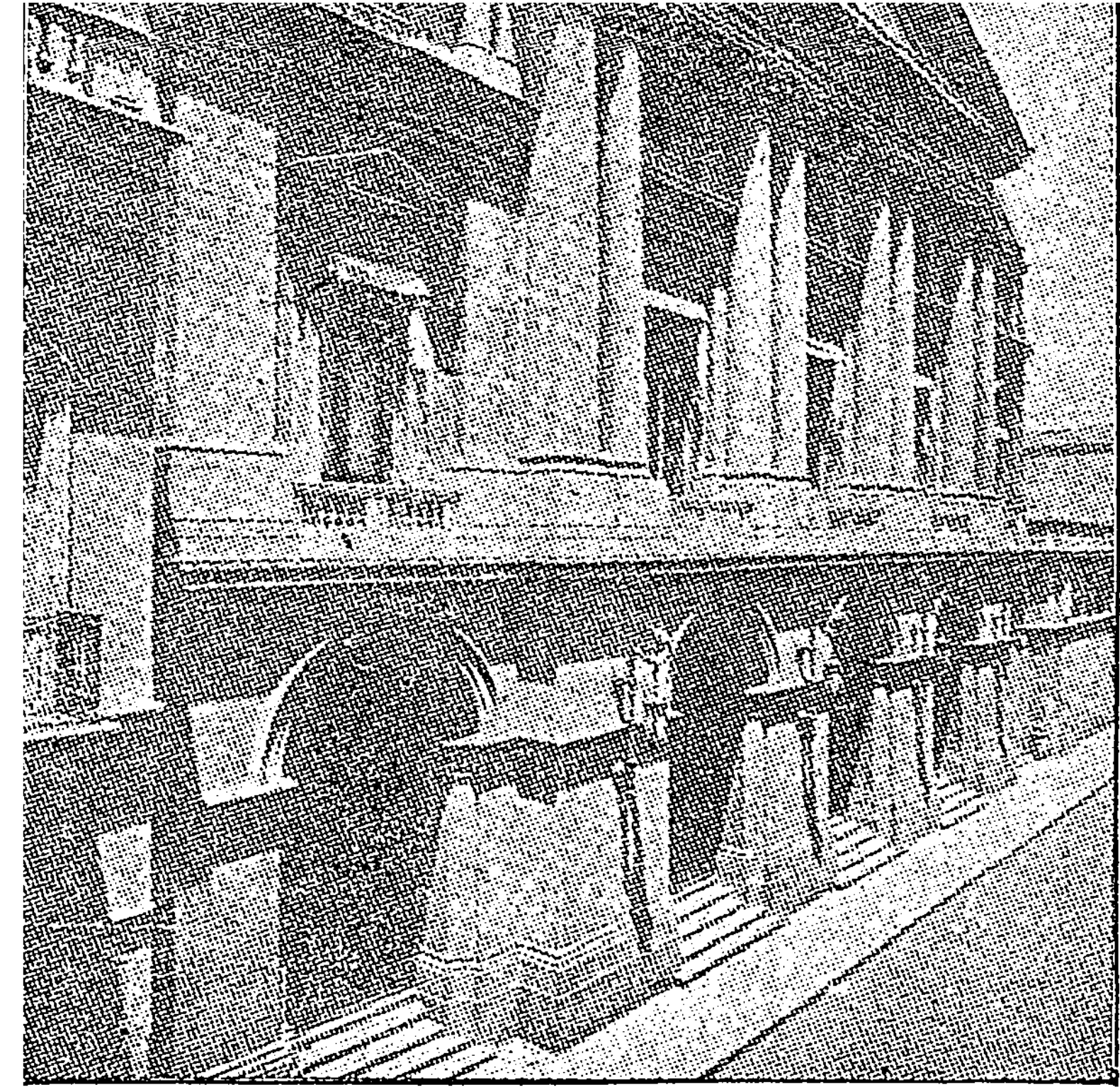
Junta Monument, La Plata, Argentina.



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Importing Sheep from Dock at Buenos Ayres.



"The National Library Is Without a Rival in South America."



"The Physiognomy of the Streets of Buenos Ayres Is Wholly European"

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GETTING ACQUAINTED WITH THE PEOPLE OF ARGENTINA

(Continued from Page 4.)

gentine Republic has been founded at the Sorbonne, and there is talk of offering it to him. Certainly no one could better perform its duties. Yet it would surprise me if he could in this way break off his multitudinous engagements in the Argentine. They say he will in person open the course of lectures. I can promise an intellectual treat to his hearers.

I did not hear of any Germans or Englishmen who had to the same extent as the Italians and the French undergone transformation into Argentines. The German, whose fundamental roughness (to call it by no stronger name) is frequently masked by good humor, works his way into all classes of society, but without losing any of his original traits. M. Mi-hanowitch, who is at the head of a colossal business of river and sea transportation, must, notwithstanding his Austrian origin, be considered as an Argentine, though he is surely of Slav blood.

The English invariably retain their individuality. I am told that in Patagonia, where they are carrying on sheep breeding on a scale that leaves Australia in the rear, they have built up cozy dwellings, where every night they change into their smoking jackets for the family repast, and never miss taking a holiday of two or three months in their native land. They never become Argentines. This, however, does not prevent their being at the head of the business world of La Plata, where they exert a powerful influ-

ence on the industrial and commercial life of the people.

It would have greatly interested me to study the foreign colonies, but time was lacking. Of the Spanish the only man I was able to see anything of was M. Coelho, the distinguished Governor of the Spanish Bank of La Plata, whose untiring energy reaches out daily in new directions; he gave me many proofs of kindness, for which I am sincerely grateful.

It is certain that the recent visit of Field Marshal von der Goltz to the Argentine must prove useful to German influence. As we know, it is the Germans who are responsible for the present organization of the Argentine Army. Their Government, wiser than some others, did not hesitate to send to La Plata some of their most skilled officers, who were naturally received by Argentine society with the deference that was their due.

The eminent legal scholar, Prof. Enrico Ferri, lately re-elected Deputy of the group that we should call "Independent Socialists," is and has long been the official

mouthpiece of the Italian colony, and his oratorical campaigns are of frequent occurrence in the Argentine. He is in manner a mixture of the most perfect suavity and flexibility of mind, with lofty aims and a generous eloquence. His many qualities forced him to the front in spite of some resistance on the part of the Extreme Right, who were afraid of his Socialism, and of the Extreme Left, who have not forgotten some broken ties.

I must ask the indulgence of the French colony if the space at my disposal does not permit of my doing full justice to them. I have to the best of my ability touched on their foremost figures. I have placed M. Py, the Governor of the French Bank of La Plata, where he belongs, with M. Pulsoye, who renders him such valuable assistance in the capacity of manager of that establishment. Neither must I omit the name of Mme. Moreno, (of the Comédie Française,) who has so thoroughly mastered Spanish that she has founded and now directs a conservatoire in which she prepares artistes for the stage.

It would be the more unpardonable to forget this lady, since she is frequently to be met in salons, where she recites French prose and verse with a perfection of style that delights the Argentine Parisians. While waiting for the day when the Academies will give to women a right to be learned, let us do honor to intelligence even when we find it as an accessory to feminine charm.